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Marital and Family Therapy



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DESCRIPTION

Marital and family therapy has been recommended for the treatment of traumatized adults. Typically, these treatments are suggested as an adjunct to other forms of treatment that are designed to address the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) more directly. Marital and family treatments for trauma survivors fall into one of two general categories: systemic approaches designed to treat marital or family disruption, and supportive approaches designed to help family members offer support for an individual being treated for PTSD. Of the two approaches, the systemic treatments have received more attention in the literature, and the descriptions of these interventions are more detailed than are those of supportive approaches.

GENERAL STRENGTH OF THE EVIDENCE

Only a couple of empirical investigations of marital or family therapy were found in the literature (only one that included a randomized, controlled trial). In general, information regarding the efficacy of marital and family approaches for treating trauma survivors encompasses clinical descriptions based on the experience of a single clinician or clinic. Few of these descriptions include any systematic assessment of the efficacy of the approach (e.g., standardized measurement), and none have been replicated across clinics.

COURSE OF TREATMENT

Marital and family treatments of trauma survivors are typically seen as time-limited, problem-focused interventions. These specific courses of treatment vary depending on the format and philosophy of the treatment. The goals of these treatments are typically to foster communication and mutual support around posttrauma reactions and symptoms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the present time, then, it is recommended that marital and family therapy be used as adjuncts to treatments that are focused on the alleviation of PTSD symptoms and not be seen as treatments for PTSD themselves. However, as marital and family disruption is frequently a problem among trauma survivors, it is also recommended that clinicians evaluate the need for marital and family therapy when treating trauma survivors. When such a need is identified, it is recommended that marital and family therapy occur concurrently or following treatment of the survivor's PTSD symptoms. Finally, it is recommended that marital and family therapy focus on improving communication and reducing conflict among family members. This may entail communication about current problems or issues related to the trauma and its aftermath.

<i>Indications</i>	<i>Strength of evidence</i>
Marital or family distress	E
Intact system prior to trauma	E
Traumatized individual(s) also in treatment for individual symptoms	E
Traumatized client in agreement with intervention involving others	E
Marital/family treatment will help individual recovery	E
<i>Contraindications</i>	
Family violence	D
Lack of commitment to family/marriage	E

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Figley, C. R. (1989). *Helping traumatized families*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson, S. M., & Williams-Kceeler, L. (1998). Creating healing relationships for couples dealing with trauma: The use of emotionally focused marital therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 24, 25-40.